GRASSROOTS JOURNALS

Grassroots Journal of Natural Resources, Vol.8 No.1 (April 2025)
ISSN: 2581-6853 | CODEN: GJNRA9 | Published by The Grassroots Institute
Website: https://grassrootsjournals.org/gjnr | Main Indexing: Scopus and WoS

ISSN 2581-6853 | 8(1) April 2025

M – 00503 | Review & Analytical Article

Saving and Transforming Cultural Landscapes for Sustainable Tourism

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How to cite this paper: Li, J., Mirzayeva, A., Pak, E., Akhundova, A. and Panjieva, N. (2025). Saving and Transforming Cultural Landscapes for Sustainable Tourism. *Grassroots Journal of Natural Resources*, 8(1): 407-430. Doi: https://doi.org/10.33002/nr2581.6853.080116

Received: 25 February 2025
Reviewed: 28 March 2025
Provisionally Accepted: 30 March 2025
Revised: 05 April 2025
Finally Accepted: 10 April 2025
Published: 25 April 2025
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Abstract

In recent decades, cultural landscapes, complex socio-ecological systems formed by the interplay of human activity and the natural environment, have been increasingly acknowledged as legacy assets and dynamic entities for sustainable management. This study examined the impact of sustainable tourism on saving and transforming cultural landscapes across various national, geographic, and sociocultural contexts. The analysis of sources published between 2017 and 2024 revealed that sustainable tourism is gaining momentum in various parts of the world, particularly in European countries. However, its adoption in developing countries remains limited, primarily due to structural challenges. Factors such as insufficient community knowledge, restricted financing availability, and deficiencies in policy support exacerbate inequities in the implementation of sustainable tourism. Despite these challenges, review of accumulated evidence highlighted the positive effect of sustainable tourism on revitalising cultural landscapes, which takes the form of increased public awareness, a growing number of tourist visits, employment opportunities, and home-stay preferences of residents. Nonetheless, the implementation of sustainable tourism alternatives continues to be a challenging task in several regions due to its resource-intensive nature, compounded by inadequate or non-existent governmental support. Upon analysing case studies and best practices from different countries, including Poland, Afghanistan, Georgia, Thailand, Indonesia, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan, it was concluded that sustainable tourism as a part of the cultural landscape management efforts can be facilitated through government support and community involvement. The latter implies engaging communities in articulating their long-term vision for the area and providing them with the necessary tools for implementing this vision.

Keywords

Geographic area; Conservation; Cost-and-benefit analysis; Community development; Citizen engagement

Introduction

Since the dawn of civilisation, human societies have continuously shaped their surroundings, giving rise to cultural landscapes. In the 21st century, some of the most renowned cultural landscapes attract thousands of tourists each year. While tourism presents opportunities for cultural exchange and economic growth, it also raises concerns about the potential degradation of these landscapes due to excessive human activity and inadequate preservation efforts. The significance of cultural landscapes for humanity cannot be underestimated. Kumar, Chhabra and Sharma (2023) argued that such landscapes are iconic symbols of the nation's rich history, art, and architecture. In turn, Silva and Henriques (2021) assert that cultural landscapes symbolise a community's past and are a way to safeguard their identity in an ever-changing environment. Therefore, cultural landscapes are not only of historic but also philosophical and spiritual value. An array of roles performed by cultural landscapes suggests that their protection should become a priority task for different nations, as well as the global community. In contrast to other material objects that are of historic, philosophical, or spiritual value, cultural landscapes are relatively few. Koch and Gillespie (2023) pointed out that the World Heritage List started in 1992, contains only 127 cultural landscape properties, which means they account for only 10.9% of all objects on the list. The experts assumed that a lack of awareness, especially in remote areas, could be the reason for cultural landscapes' under-representation on the list (Davydyuk, 2024). However, another possible perspective suggests that many of these sites are deteriorating due to anthropogenic influences. Cultural tourist visits, which are gaining momentum around the world, can have a devastating effect on a cultural landscape (Shumka, Peri and Lato 2020; Trusova *et al.,* 2020a). Alamineh *et al.* (2023) highlighted this impact, concluding that tourism often leads to the commodification of culture, the erosion of local communities' socio-cultural assets, and the production of inauthentic cultural artefacts. Davis *et al.* (2020) discovered that the problem of disappearing cultural landscapes is real and requires decisive actions. In the United States alone, 13 cultural landscapes are on the verge of extinction, which provides insights into the scope of the problem at the global level (Eden, 2017; Gritsuk *et al.*, 2017). These findings indicate the need to reassess current conservation policies and establish approaches that balance cultural preservation with community and environmental well-being.

Regulatory frameworks are crucial for establishing standards and enforcing compliance, but they may be inflexible or too centralised, hindering adaptation to local circumstances and impeding community ownership (Lyndyuk *et al.*, 2023; Vaskivska *et al.*, 2023). Technological solutions, albeit novel, are becoming more accessible and affordable, especially in poor areas. Yet, their application necessitates substantial investment and technical proficiency. Sustainable tourism provides a synergistic strategy that merges environmental preservation with socio-economic advancement (Baloch *et al*., 2023). Getting locals involved in taking care of historic sites and making money through ecotourism can help with maintenance, protecting biodiversity, and cultural programming (Roman *et al.*, 2024; Shumka *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, sustainable tourism might make people less likely to do illegal things like poaching and cutting down trees while encouraging tourists and operators to behave responsibly.

This perspective contests the doubts articulated by several specialists concerning the alignment of tourism with the preservation of cultural landscapes. In opposition to apprehensions over the detrimental impacts of tourism, a nascent perspective promotes sustainable tourism as a feasible remedy. Advocates contend that, when meticulously organised and informed by sustainability principles, tourism can significantly revitalise cultural landscapes. The UNECE 2019 report defined sustainable tourism as a type of tourism that incorporates such new perspectives as revitalising regions, sustaining the environment, and improving quality of life. Silva and Henriques (2021) further noted that sustainable tourism is gaining momentum, especially in developed countries. Experts predict that sustainable tourism will increasingly gain significance in European tourism, as demonstrated by current trends and efforts. In 2024, the European Union strengthened its dedication to sustainable tourism by implementing tougher laws and incentives for environmentally friendly activities, suggesting a future rise in the proportion of sustainable tourism (Initiative of the European Union, 2024).

However, implementing sustainable tourism practices to revitalise cultural landscapes has become a daunting task in different areas around the world. Niewiadomski and Brouder (2024) argue that the challenge persists because, while proponents emphasise the importance of transitioning to sustainable tourism, there has been insufficient focus on practical strategies for achieving it. Schmitz and Herreo-Jáuregui (2021) stressed that many sustainable tourism initiatives end as “paper parks” because communities lack knowledge and tools to put cultural landscape conservation ideas into practice. Askarova *et al.* (2023) stressed that the problem is particularly persistent in developing countries, for example, Uzbekistan, where communities have limited awareness of sustainable tourism, fail to acknowledge its benefits, or receive little to no governmental support in putting their conservation ideas into practice.

This study aims to understand the effect of sustainable tourism on preserving and transforming cultural landscapes in the context of Western and Eastern countries, including Poland, Afghanistan, Georgia, Thailand, Indonesia, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan.

Materials and Methods

A review of the literature was performed to assess the effect of preserving and transforming cultural landscapes on promoting sustainable tourism. The sources for review were gathered from reputable databases, including EBSCO, Scopus, Web of Science, Science Direct, and JSTOR. The search process was informed by the following keywords and phrases: “tourism”, “tourist visits”, “sustainable tourism”, “sustainable tourism management”, “landscape”, “cultural landscape”, “cultural landscape conservation”, “landscape management”, “community involvement”, “community engagement”, and “change frameworks”. The search was narrowed down to 27 sources by choosing recent sources (most were published in the last 5 years), relevant (the studies chosen were related to either sustainable tourism, cultural landscape preservation, or both), and credible (the sources were written by authors whose credentials are easy to find and check). Further analysis of the selected data sources aimed to examine the relationship between cultural landscape management and sustainable tourism across various countries.

Doi: https://doi.org/10.33002/nr2581.6853.080116 Open Access

The first stage of the research process involved defining cultural landscapes and evaluating their contribution to community development. The analysis of academic sources from 2022 to 2023 defined the phenomenon, assessed its evolution over time, and distilled its key aspects. The review of literature was carried out to examine why preserving cultural landscapes is named a priority for many international organisations, including UNESCO and the World Heritage Committee.

The study further involved the significance of sustainable tourism for protecting and preserving cultural landscapes in different countries, including Poland, Georgia, Thailand, Indonesia, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. This study identified these countries as case studies to examine within varied geographic, socio-political, and economic frameworks. The countries exemplify a range of developmental stages and governance frameworks: Poland represents post-socialist European nations incorporating sustainable tourism into cultural policies; Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan underscore challenges in fragile or transitioning states with constrained institutional capacity; Thailand and Indonesia demonstrate community-based and ecotourism within global tourism centres; and Uzbekistan and Georgia reflect post-Soviet cultural resurgence alongside international tourism expansion. Collectively, these cases offer a comparative framework for comprehending the management of cultural landscapes under differing contexts of economic development, institutional robustness, and cultural norms.

Considering the multi-faceted nature of sustainable development, the study analysed peer-reviewed journal articles and industry reports, including: Kyrgyz Republic: Issyk-Kul environmental management and sustainable tourism development project (Asian Development Bank, 2024), Kyrgyzstan Visitor Arrivals (CEIC Data, 2024), GREEN TOUR: Sustainable tourism: Strengthens nature and people in Kyrgyzstan (SWITCH-Asia, 2024), Sustainable tourism experience programs (United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business, 2019), and The Environmental Impact of Global Tourism (World Travel & Tourism Council and Sustainable Tourism Global Center, 2023), to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of promoting sustainable tourism as a part of the cultural landscape conservation initiative. The analysis at this stage of the research process incorporated a range of credible and relevant sources published between 2017 and 2024. The period from 2017 to 2024 was selected to encompass recent developments in sustainable tourism and cultural landscape conservation, highlighting significant global shifts, including the incorporation of sustainability objectives following the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals, the establishment of sustainable practices, and the transformative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. This timeframe facilitates the examination of pre- and post-pandemic dynamics, encompassing alterations in policy priorities, funding structures, and community involvement in heritage conservation. By integrating modern scholarship and policy documents, it guarantees that the study's findings are pertinent and applicable to current challenges and best practices in the field.

Based on the cost-benefit analysis, the study introduced management strategies aimed to address concerns, while being built on the benefits of sustainable tourism as a part of the landscape conservation initiative. This study's cost-benefit analysis utilised a qualitative framework that included environmental, economic, and socio-cultural variables. Benefits were evaluated using metrics like heightened visitor arrivals, job creation, historical conservation, and community involvement. Expenses include infrastructural

investment, environmental hazards, cultural commercialisation, and administrative obstacles. Data were obtained from peer-reviewed publications, government papers, and international development sources, enabling comparative analysis across the chosen case studies without dependence on formal econometric modelling.

Results

On the need for cultural landscape preservation

Since the earliest days of human existence, people have actively shaped and transformed the landscape. However, transformations have become particularly obvious in the 20th and 21st centuries due to the growing number of sophisticated tools used in different sectors of the economy. Considering these transformations, experts have paid attention to the notion of cultural landscapes and their preservation through sustainable tourism.

Martyshova (2023) stressed that, although the notion of cultural landscape is gaining momentum in academic literature, it still lacks an ambiguous definition. The researcher further suggested three different interpretations of the concept based on the dominant factors, namely, natural, cultural, and information environments. The ambiguity of the notion was also confirmed by Panagiotopoulos *et al*. (2023), who proposed a holistic approach to understanding and defining the cultural landscape. The holistic approach proposed by experts involved analysing cultural landscapes from multiple perspectives, including scientific, social, political, and economic viewpoints. The multi-aspect construction allows one to assume that a cultural landscape is unique and therefore worth preserving. Zou *et al*. (2022) agreed with this assumption and concluded that the cultural landscape heritage involves rare and irreplaceable cultural landscapes recognised by UNESCO and the World Heritage Committee. As part of their activity, these organisations create an extended list of cultural landscapes and engage the community in protecting them for the sake of sustainable development.

Similar to cultural landscape, the idea of sustainable development might seem rather vague and difficult to define. Ogryzek (2023) attributed this difficulty to the fact that the idea of sustainable development has evolved. Indeed, the rise and development of new sectors of the economy have not only exacerbated already existing environmental problems but also created a range of new ones. Ametepey *et al*. (2023) suggested examining sustainable development as an interaction between three larger elements, namely, environmental, economic, and social. Despite differences in the aforementioned approaches to defining the researched notion, most of them agree that sustainable development implies long-term planning. Therefore, it is possible to define such development in terms of meeting the needs of present generations while not compromising the needs of the generations to come.

Sustainable development practices might be the key to managing cultural landscapes, which, according to Zhou, Cenci, and Zhang (2023), require protection. The experts underlined that a cultural landscape, characterised as a physical area moulded by the enduring interaction between humans and nature, is an embodiment of human history and cultural heritage, the broader category comprising both tangible and intangible legacies of previous generations. Therefore, protection of the cultural landscape is seen

as a way to preserve an intergenerational connection for the sake of the entire humanity. A similar idea was voiced by Jenish (2017) in the National Development Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2018-2040, whose authors stressed that Kyrgyzstan has been attractive for tourists due to its multi-ethnic cultural composition, long history, and rich cultural heritage. The latter includes such cultural landscapes as Ala Archa National Park, Sary-Chelek Biosphere Reserve, and Jeti-Oguz Gorge. Based on the report, conservation of these and other cultural landscapes has been a priority for the state government and local community leaders. Bornioli *et al*. (2023) attributed this priority to the connection between cultural landscapes and positive environmental appraisal, which means that individuals tend to associate themselves with specific aspects of the environment to which they belong. Hence, preserving cultural landscapes as integral elements of a specific environment might contribute to shaping individual and national identities and reinforce the sense of belonging.

However, it is worth stressing that preserving such a connection might be a challenging endeavour because cultural landscapes are at high risk of being destroyed. Mazur *et al*. (2024) attributed this risk to the fact that due to their popularity, cultural landscapes are annually visited by many tourists who contribute to depleting resources and destroying habitats of rare and endangered species. One example to illustrate this idea involves the municipality of Dobre Miasto, located at the heart of Warmia, Poland. As explained by Zagroba (2024), this cultural landscape managed to survive World War I, while 65% of its buildings were destroyed decades later. This case suggests that people are transforming the landscape, and some of these transformations can be dramatic.

Similar challenges are being observed in the Western Tien Shan region that was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2016. The international non-governmental organisation Rivers Without Boundaries (2024) explained that the landscape, which contains over 20 sites jointly managed by Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan, was added to the list due to various plant and animal species with a high level of endemism, as well as species of global conservation importance. However, some of these sites were identified as World Heritage properties under threat. As explained by Rivers Without Boundaries, the threat is in place because of the road and large hydropower construction inside the World Heritage sites. The dilemma is that while the construction work is being carried out to attract tourists, the increased tourist flow jeopardises cultural landscape conservation efforts.

The negative effect of anthropogenic activity, including tourism, led Palang *et al*. (2017) to assert that the notions of landscapes and sustainable development are difficult to combine in a single sentence. However, this idea might be contested by mentioning that sustainable tourism, that is, a kind of tourism seeking to preserve cultural heritage for the generations to come, can be considered a compromise between landscape conservation and tourism promotion. A closer look into the essence and principles of sustainable tourism will probably shed light on its relation to the cultural landscape conservation efforts.

Connection between cultural landscape preservation and sustainable tourism

Considering the above discussion, there are experts who contest the statement made by Palang *et al*. (2017), asserting that tourism can be an effective response to the degradation of cultural landscapes. Shruthi (2023) argued that sustainable tourism is different from other types of tourism due to its reliance on the four principles of sustainable development. The expert further mentioned that these are the principles of environmental sustainability, social sustainability, compatibility with the cultural values of the human community, and cost-effective economic development that does not compromise the needs of the generations to come. Figure 1 illustrates the integral elements of sustainable tourism.

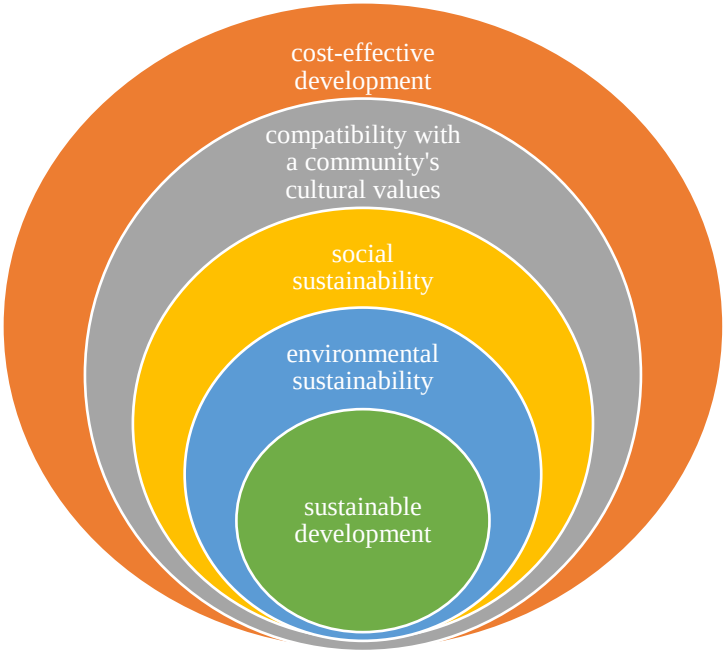

Figure 1: Elements of sustainable development

The picture shows that, although the four elements of sustainable development are independent, they are also interrelated when it comes to preserving and promoting cultural landscapes around the world. Davis-Sramek *et al*. (2020) confirmed this idea by, for example, stressing that social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development precondition short- and long-term strategic decision-making. This two-way connection, in particular, applies to planning landscape conservation efforts because a resilient community has sufficient sources to preserve the landscape, including its cultural elements. In turn, the community's resilience and sustainable development are rooted in articulated values and thorough resource planning (Hysi *et al.*, 2024; Stoliarchuk *et al.*, 2022). With a holistic approach in mind, sustainable tourism is seen as an effective tool to address a repertoire of issues facing a community, including the preservation of cultural landscapes.

Doi: https://doi.org/10.33002/nr2581.6853.080116 Open Access

Such an idea was, for example, voiced by Stanikzai, Seerat and Humdard (2023), who examined the impact of sustainable tourism on the preservation of Afghanistan's cultural heritage. The experts denied an over-simplistic approach to the problem that involves examining tourism from a purely environmental lens. They further argued that examining the issue from an economic and social angle can provide a nuanced understanding of how sustainable tourism supports the protection of cultural landscapes. As explained by Stanikzai, Seerat and Humdard (2023), sustainable tourism entails a plethora of benefits for Afghanistan, including job creation, economic diversification, and income generation. The significance of each particular benefit was further examined in a range of other contexts.

Recent research reveals that Afghanistan's foreign tourist revenue was roughly $75 million in 2020 (CEIC Data, 2020). Forecasts indicate a little rise, with revenues anticipated to attain around $189 million by 2028, signifying an annual growth rate of 2% (ReportLinker, 2024). Although these data constitute a minor percentage of Afghanistan's GDP, they highlight the potential for expansion in the tourist sector. International cooperation has enabled substantial conservation work in the Bamiyan Valley, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The UNESCO/Japan Funds-in-Trust project has engaged more than 300 workers, enhancing local lives while promoting preservation initiatives (UNESCO, 2024). Furthermore, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, with the backing of the Aliph Foundation, started an 18-month conservation initiative in 2023 to preserve the Mes Aynak site, a 2,000-year-old Buddhist city (Geranpayeh, 2023). These projects safeguard cultural assets while also invigorating local economies via employment development linked to conservation and tourist activities.

Fauziah (2024) examined the rise and evolution of sustainable tourism in Indonesia and discovered that it is gaining momentum among both domestic and foreign visitors. The expert cited statistical data, according to which international tourist visits to the country increased by 196.85% in 2023 compared to 2022. The cited data means there is a growing demand for workers who can provide domestic and international tourists with all sorts of services they need, including accommodation, food, and guiding. For countries like Indonesia, the growing significance of tourism is positive news because there is a chance to overcome economic stagnation caused by the global recession, the coronavirus restrictions, and other factors, plunging thousands of people into poverty. Many of these people can become employed in the sustainable tourism sector and assist in accumulating resources that will be further redirected to preserving cultural landscapes.

A similar positive trend is observed in Kyrgyzstan, where different types of visits are becoming increasingly popular with domestic and foreign visitors. Based on the data compiled by the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (2024), there was a considerable increase in the number of tourist visits to the country in the period between 2017 and 2023, as is shown on the graph in figure 2.

Another noteworthy fact is that recently, the formal sector has become more popular than the informal sector among domestic and foreign tourists. This fact, in particular, indicates that the government has acknowledged the potential encapsulated in tourism and invests efforts in promoting its different types, including sustainable tourist visits. Xing (2024) also confirmed the positive effect of sustainable tourism on the economic

development of nations. Based on the analysis of 50 destinations with the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) certification, the researcher concluded that sustainable tourism can result in an average of a 20% increase in per-capita expenditure. This finding is worth a closer examination because it is remarkable for at least two reasons. The first reason is that the study of W. Xing asserted the role of sustainable tourism in driving economic development and accumulating resources that will be further invested in the preservation of cultural landscapes. Notably, this reason was also elaborated in a number of other studies, including that of Sak, Eren and Bayram (2022) and Mukhammadsiddik, Bobir, and Shohruzbek (2022), who described sustainable tourism as a driving force behind economic development, especially in areas where other opportunities are scarce. The second reason is that sustainable tourism provides insights into the instruments that prove to be effective in the cultural landscape conservation initiative. This reason is rooted in the fact that the study of Xing (2024) compared the income generated by the GSTC-certified landscapes to non-certified landscapes. The experts discovered that some tools, for example, certification, can be particularly helpful in attracting tourists and generating funds to be further invested in the promotion and preservation of specific cultural landscapes.

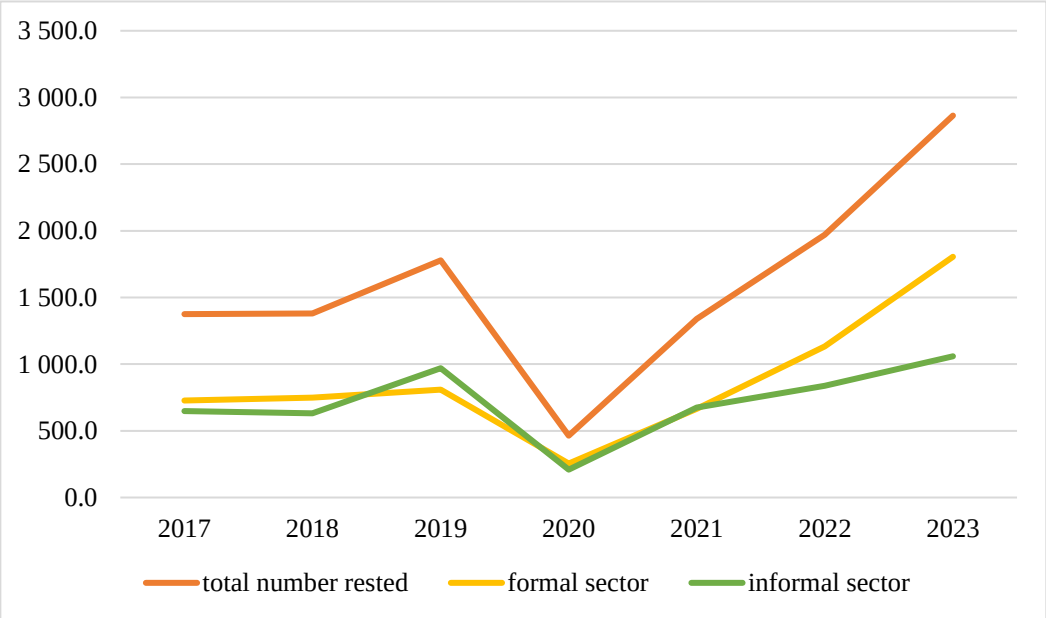

Figure 2: Tourist visits to Kyrgyzstan, 2017-2024
Source: National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (2024)

In turn, Hasayotin, Maisak and Supanut (2023) asserted that promotion of sustainable tourism is particularly relevant for developing countries that rely heavily on domestic and international visits as a source of their income. The experts examined this assertion in the context of Thailand, where tourism generates about 17% of the gross domestic product (GDP). The coronavirus outbreak became a heavy blow to the national economy, and the government had to take decisive actions to revive the sector (Trusova *et al.*, 2020b; Hadasik and Kubiczek, 2022). As explained by Hasayotin, Maisak and Supanut (2023), those actions included diversification, support for local businesses, and infrastructure investment. Furthermore, the government focused on adopting and

promoting sustainable practices, which were among the factors contributing to the post-coronavirus stability in the country.

Considering the aforementioned research evidence, it is possible to assert that sustainable tourism becomes a step toward protecting and preserving cultural landscapes across the countries. As this type of tourism becomes increasingly popular, it can attract thousands of visitors and generate resources needed to address local problems, including landscape preservation. Acknowledging the potential encapsulated in sustainable tourism, countries use it as a tool to draw global attention to their cultural landscapes. Rössler and Lin (2018) asserted that Kyrgyzstan is, in particular, known for the cultural landscape of Issyk Kul Lake located along the Silk Roads. For many tourists, this landscape becomes one of the key reasons for visiting the country and revitalising its tourist sector. In turn, the CEIC Data (2024) experts illustrated the contribution made by tourist visits, asserting that in December 2022, the country was visited by 7,063,000 followers, which is almost twice as much as in the year before.

Experts of the Asian Development Bank (2024) argued that the sustainability of tourism is the key to the segment's liveability. However, they also put it directly that the development of sustainable tourism for preserving cultural landscapes is a formidable undertaking, which is associated with a plethora of challenges. A closer look into some of these most common challenges might provide insights into effective response strategies.

Hindrances to promoting sustainable tourism in cultural landscape areas

Placing the notions of landscape preservation and sustainable tourism into the same sentence might seem problematic because of the obstacles facing the communities where cultural landscapes are located. Upon examining the Georgian case, Mushkudiani, Chkhirodze and Tevdoradze (2023) concluded that the key challenges to adopting sustainable tourism practices across various contexts are economic, ecological, social, and cultural. Pan *et al*. (2018) put it directly that the development of sustainable tourism is a resource-intensive endeavour that implies considerable investments into smart technologies, environmentally friendly infrastructure, and green energy. The majority of developing countries cannot afford such expenses, which stumbles the advancement of sustainable tourism in different corners of the world. Askarova *et al*. (2023) researched this assertion in the Uzbek context and concluded that although the country has sufficient potential for launching various types of sustainable tourism, including agritourism, this sector of the economy remains underdeveloped due to economic constraints. Oftentimes, farmers are unaware of existing opportunities or do not receive any support from the state to launch green tourist locations.

Ecological issues are also taken into consideration when examining the prospects of developing sustainable tourism to protect cultural landscapes. Experts of the World Travel & Tourism Council and Sustainable Tourism Global Center (2023) assert that tourism is responsible for 8% of the global carbon emissions. In turn, Deb *et al.* (2023) studied the correlation between tourist arrivals, per capita GDP, and CO_2 emissions in the period between 2001 and 2019. According to experts, a considerable rise in per capita GDP resulted in a 60% increase in CO_2 emissions during the analysed period. In the

world's most popular destinations, tourism is seen as a key contributor to environmental degradation.

Moreover, cultural and social factors should be considered when examining the hindrances to sustainable tourism in different areas across the world. Varazzani, Sullivan-Paul and Tuomaila (2023) offered that socio-cultural challenges to adopting sustainable tourist practices should be viewed through the behavioural lens. Communities fail to adopt sustainable tourism as a part of their cultural landscape conservation because it is a part of human nature to deny and avoid everything unknown and uncommon (Matviichuk *et al.*, 2023; Zymaroieva *et al.*, 2021). Meanwhile, sustainable tourism has not yet become an integral element of the global cultural canvas. A similar conclusion was reached by Liburd, Menke and Tomej (2023), who collected evidence from 11 nature and national parks in Denmark to detect possible reasons why it takes some time to adopt sustainable tourism practices. As explained by experts, stakeholders might resist the transition to sustainable tourism if they lack an understanding of what this phenomenon involves, what benefits it entails, and how it is consistent with their values and beliefs about the nature and cultural landscape protection.

In turn, Mushkudiani, Chkhirodze and Tevdoradze (2023) contributed to understanding socio-cultural challenges by pointing out ethical dilemmas arising from an interaction between a cultural landscape, local people, and those striving to promote sustainable tourism in a particular area. The experts asserted that the conflicts become inevitable when the local population's opinion of what to preserve and what to develop is given little to no attention. Local people might also resist the adoption of sustainable tourism practices when they view them as a threat to their routine and wellbeing (Mayis *et al.*, 2021; Shahini *et al.*, 2022). Most of the mentioned challenges are also observed in Kyrgyzstan, where sustainable tourism has not yet become an inalienable element of the socio-cultural canvas. As explained by the Collaborating Centre on Sustainable Consumption and Production (2024) experts, over 50 participants of the recent PARETO project grouped hindrances to sustainable tourism into four extended categories, namely, capacity building, access to green finance for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), tourist engagement, public awareness and supporting policies enabling sustainable production and consumption.

The PARETO members tended to agree that despite a considerable potential encapsulated in the sustainable tourism segment of Kyrgyzstan's economy, local communities and SMEs still lack resources and support to uncover this potential to the advantage of everyone involved. The experts of the European Union's Switch Asia initiative argued that the governmental support for sustainable tourism is now quite episodic. Some of the most noticeable transformations in the segment are, probably, associated with the EU SWITCH-Asia (2024) Green Tour Project, which was started in 2020 and aims to facilitate the country's transition to a green economy by supporting the sustainability and competitiveness of its touristic segment (Dashchuk, 2023; Trusova *et al.*, 2021a). The SWITCH case revealed that although the state government and local community might resist changes in the sector, they eventually get involved once the benefits become obvious. These benefits, in particular, include 1,058 seasonal and permanent jobs created since 2020, 810 people who increased their income by 27%, and 198 SMEs that increased their revenue by 28%. The cited case suggests that local

communities can address challenges associated with the transition to sustainable tourism and cultural landscape conservation if they are being supported in this endeavour.

The dynamics of cultural landscape preservation through sustainable tourism may be successfully analysed using Ostrom's theory of commons governance, which provides a framework for comprehending how communities self-organise to sustainably manage shared resources (Panzaru, 2024; Trusova *et al.*, 2021b). Cultural landscapes, especially in rural or environmentally vulnerable areas, serve as common-pool resources, where individual behaviours, such as overexploitation or mismanagement, can result in collective deterioration (Guliyeva, 2023; Komilova *et al.*, 2024). Utilising Ostrom's concepts, including clearly defined limits, collective-choice arrangements, monitoring, and graded punishments, elucidates how local communities might be empowered to take stewardship of their environments. The PARETO project in Kyrgyzstan implemented some of these ideas by promoting local rule-making, monitoring environmental indicators such as deforestation, and facilitating participatory planning procedures. The efficacy of community-based tourism initiatives in areas such as Issyk-Kul exemplifies the existence of nested enterprises, wherein local governance is bolstered by national and transnational frameworks, thereby establishing a multi-tiered institutional structure that corresponds with Ostrom's polycentric model. This study enhances the understanding of how socio-ecological resilience may arise from locally rooted, cooperatively managed conservation initiatives by situating community-led tourism within this theoretical framework.

In summary, cultural landscape preservation through sustainable tourism is seen as a way to secure a nation's identity and heritage, enhance a community's resilience, and accumulate funds to address a repertoire of socio-economic issues, especially in remote and rural areas. For some countries or communities, transitioning to sustainable tourism might become an intimidating challenge because of multiple challenges to address. Nevertheless, a cost-benefit analysis, which is rooted in case studies from different parts of the world, reveals that the potential benefits of cultural landscape conservation and sustainable tourism outweigh the issues to address.

Discussion

As the benefits of sustainable tourism for saving and transforming cultural landscapes are numerous, it is essential to suggest strategies to overcome the barriers to adopting sustainable practices. Dias, Viana and Pereira (2024) stress that the lack of long-term vision is among the reasons why some communities fail to adopt sustainable tourism practices. This assertion is in line with the findings of Thi *et al*. (2024), stressing that local people, including the population of Thailand, might have limited to no awareness of what sustainable tourism is and how it can benefit their communities. A similar assumption was made by Askarova *et al*. (2023), who discovered that although Uzbekistan has considerable potential for the development of agritourism, only a small portion of farmers are aware of this option and understand how it can boost their sector. The lack of long-term vision is a significant problem because it deprives stakeholders of an understanding of which instruments they can use to promote sustainable tourism and preserve cultural landscapes.

The detected issue can be overcome through the vision and mission development, which Dias, Viana and Pereira (2024) named among the inalienable elements of sustainable strategic planning. Clearly articulated mission and vision provide an idea of where a community is now and where it wants to be in the future. Velez *et al*. (2023) suggested that understanding the difference between a community's actual and desired status facilitates the selection of adequate landscape preservation and sustainable tourism strategy. Another approach to promoting landscape preservation and sustainable tourism was suggested by Azizah and Harofah (2023), who examined the prospects of encouraging Djagongan Koena tourism in Kejawar Banyumas Village to become a cultural tourism village. As explained by experts, effective promotion of cultural landscape preservation and sustainable tourism development depends on optimising the management of tourist sites. The researchers applied the notion of optimisation to a repertoire of efforts aimed at creating attractions that capture visitors' or a community's attention. The experts further utilised the concept of attractive tourist sites to refer to the destinations that have enough space for parking and other facilities, provide visitors with sufficient information, and strengthen spatial regulations.

Creating tourism sites of this kind is, obviously, a resource-intensive endeavour that is seldom undertaken without governmental support. Schmitz and Herreo-Jáuregui (2021) asserted that without governmental support, many protected areas (PAs) end up as what is known as "paper parks", which are conservation strategies that have never been put into action. The experts attributed the idea-practice gap to the fact that PAs are commonly dependent on administrative borders and political legislation. The lack of support or excessive bureaucracy hinders conservation initiatives and relevant sustainable tourism practices. A similar conclusion was made by Azizah and Harofah (2023), who stressed the significance of cooperation between the local community and the government in the conservation efforts. In turn, Aigwi *et al*. (2021) argued that such cooperation is mediated by a repertoire of factors, including financial support taking the form of government grants. Based on the data retrieved from the New Zealand rural context, the researchers concluded that investing in the protection of heritage buildings through government grants offers a lifeline for the protection of built heritage. The scholars further stressed the significance of an equal distribution of grants across the areas to conserve cultural landscapes and promote sustainable tourism. As explained by Aigwi *et al*., the 21st-century New Zealand continues experiencing an imbalance due to the highest share of government funding being distributed to major urban sectors. A more equitable distribution of resources is, in particular, required to support community involvement in conserving cultural landscapes and promoting sustainable tourism (Novakovska *et al.*, 2025; Tynaliev *et al.*, 2024).

The significance of community involvement in landscape conservation and sustainable tourism protection efforts was confirmed by Yao, Budthimedhee and Teeravarunyou (2024), who conducted a secondary data analysis with an aim to distil the topics that are most relevant to landscape management. Based on collected data, the researchers differentiated between three aspects of the landscape conservation initiatives, namely, "ecosystem framework, cultural heritage protection framework and population return strategy". The significance of the latter framework was also confirmed in other studies, for example, by Kapri, Ajay and Bangari (2023). Upon surveying a group of 193 respondents, the researchers reported a statistically significant correlation between a

community, cultural landscape, and home-stay choice. This finding suggests that whenever community members are involved in crucial decision-making, they are more likely to stay in their native places to preserve their cultural heritage. In contrast, Askarova *et al*. (2023) argued that rural community residents whose participation in strategic decision-making is limited tend to leave their land, which preconditions degradation of cultural landscapes and declining tourist visits.

An increase in community involvement can be achieved in a number of ways that have already been reported in academic literature. Liang *et al*. (2022) emphasised that a community should be provided with an opportunity to articulate the long-term goals. Mushkudiani, Chkhirodze and Tevdoradze (2023) explained that such a strategy will help to overcome resistance from community residents, who are seldom asked what exactly they strive to preserve and what to develop in a particular area. Upon examining the Jadar mineral extraction case in Serbia, Ivanović *et al*. (2023) further advocated for a holistic approach to the community involvement efforts. The experts explain that this approach incorporates five aspects, namely, financial capital, human capital, natural capital, social capital, and physical capital. In terms of the cultural landscape, conservation efforts and sustainable tourism development, this means that community members support specific initiatives if they get a nuanced understanding of the outcomes that they might generate. For example, the aspect of financial capital, in the interpretation of Ivanović *et al*. (2023), referred to savings, valuable items, reliable income, access to credit, and insurance. The community becomes involved in conservation efforts if these efforts improve their financial well-being and lay the foundation for economic stability. The use of this multi-faceted framework helps to reach, win loyalty, and increase engagement of various communities, regardless of their location, socio-economic status, cultural background, or other peculiarities.

The Kyrgyz government has shifted its support for sustainable tourism from mere endorsement to concrete policy implementation, exemplified by projects such as the EU-funded PARETO project. This initiative resulted in a 15% decrease in illicit logging and the implementation of biodiversity-sensitive land-use planning in pilot communities, in addition to employment development. Endorsed by the Ministry of Natural Resources, the initiative led to the establishment of local regulations that limit motorised tourism in ecologically sensitive areas, resulting in a 6% reduction in land degradation in regions neighbouring the Issyk-Kul biosphere reserve from 2022 to 2024 (Collaborating Centre on Sustainable Consumption and Production, 2024). Community engagement, reinforced by specialised training and financial incentives, has produced measurable conservation results. The SWITCH-Asia Green Tour initiative provided training for local tourist operators on eco-certification methods, resulting in a 30% increase in ecologically compatible tourism activities and the expansion of conservation buffer zones surrounding protected areas. These measures directly facilitated the stabilisation of slopes susceptible to erosion in the Sary-Chelek Reserve. In Kyrgyzstan, strategic visioning has been formalised by including sustainable tourism objectives within the National Development Strategy 2018-2040. This alignment has enabled focused investments in green infrastructure, such as the implementation of solar-powered trash management systems in three national parks by 2023, resulting in a 20% decrease in unmanaged tourist waste over two years (Asian Development Bank, 2024).

Conclusion

The present study found that cultural landscapes are essential to community development since they embody past interactions between humans and the environment and influence developmental methods, including stay-home decision-making. The finding highlights the necessity for policies that incorporate cultural landscape preservation into local development planning, including land-use zoning, eco-tourism incentives, and heritage-based employment programmes, which can promote sustainable livelihoods, strengthen place-based identity, and alleviate rural depopulation. The analysis of evidence suggests that the world's best-known cultural landscapes are also the most vulnerable because frequent tourist visits contribute to the environmental degradation of the area. Until relatively recently, it was believed that the notions of cultural landscape preservation and tourism were incompatible. However, further study of accumulated evidence revealed that the cultural landscape protection is well compatible with sustainable tourism, which strives to meet the present generation's demands while not compromising the needs of the generations to come. Sustainable tourism rests on the key principles of environmental sustainability, social sustainability, compatibility of the cultural development with the cultural values of the human community, and cost-effective economic development.

Evidence obtained from Poland, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Thailand, Indonesia, and other countries demonstrates that sustainable tourism offers a wide range of benefits for the communities involved. Sustainable tourism entails a plethora of benefits for the communities involved. Sustainable benefits can revitalise cultural landscapes by increasing public awareness of unique sites, providing employment opportunities for the people, and generating additional income that can be further invested in the cultural landscape management. Despite these and other benefits, the adoption of sustainable tourism practices remains a challenging task, especially in remote and rural areas. Based on existing evidence, implementation of sustainable tourism practices is a resource-intensive endeavour that might face resistance from the local community, whose residents are involved in the cultural landscape preservation planning and implementation. Thus, community residents lack a long-term vision and are not engaged in discussing what to preserve and what to develop.

A repertoire of strategies can be put in place to overcome a community's resistance to making sustainable tourism a part of the cultural landscape conservation effort. These strategies include, but are not limited to, engaging residents in creating the long-term vision of their community's development, providing governmental support for the cultural landscape preservation efforts, ensuring an equitable distribution of the governmental resources allocated for conservation initiatives, and increasing the community's engagement by adopting a holistic approach to the cultural site management and sustainable tourism. This research offers useful insights, although some limitations are identified. The study's dependence on Eurocentric data sources leads to inconsistent depth among examples. Future research could benefit from a more equitable incorporation of non-Western and Indigenous-led conservation frameworks, particularly from marginalised groups in Central Asia. Future research should focus on particular areas such as the influence of Indigenous governance on landscape stewardship, the function of customary law in tourism, and hybrid governance models that integrate local

knowledge with institutional assistance. This would facilitate the connection between empirical evidence and implementable plans for sustainable development.

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Authors' Declarations and Essential Ethical Compliances

Authors' Contributions (in accordance with ICMJE criteria for authorship)

Contribution	Author 1	Author 2	Author 3	Author 4	Author 5
Conceived and designed the research or analysis	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Collected the data	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Contributed to data analysis & interpretation	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Wrote the article/paper	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Critical revision of the article/paper	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Editing of the article/paper	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Supervision	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Project Administration	Yes	No	No	No	No
Funding Acquisition	No	No	No	No	No
Overall Contribution Proportion (%)	20	20	20	20	20

Funding
No financial support was received for the research and writing of this article.

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